

## INTRA-SERVICE SECTION 7 BIOLOGICAL EVALUATION FORM

**Originating Person:** Ben Frater  
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**Date:** 02/09/2012

**Project Name:** Mississippi Artificial Reef Project

**I. Service Program:** Ecological Services

**II. State:** Regional Office

**III. Station Name:** Deepwater Horizon NRDAR Field Office

### IV. Description of proposed action:

This project is being proposed and implemented by the State of Mississippi (State). However, as a member of the Department of Interior, the Deepwater Horizon NRDAR Field Office is (in part) a co-Trustee to the State in the Natural Resources Damage Assessment and Restoration planning currently unfolding for the *Deepwater Horizon* incident. Trustees bear the responsibility to approve or disapprove of any other Trustee's project. We believe this decision is a federal action that warrants consultation under Section 7 of the ESA.

The Mississippi Artificial Reef Habitat project proposes to deploy nearshore artificial reefs in Mississippi Sound. Nearshore artificial reefs provide valuable hardbottom habitat with foraging and shelter sites for various species of larvae and sessile epifauna and infauna (invertebrates and vertebrates). Currently there are 67 existing reefs areas that are each approximately 3 acres in size. At present, approximately half of the existing reef areas have a low profile and consist of crushed concrete or limestone. The locations of Mississippi's existing nearshore artificial reefs are shown in Figure 1. With the proposed project, approximately 100 acres of crushed limestone would be added to the 201-acre footprint of the existing reef areas. The project would occur periodically over the summer of 2012 through 2013.

### V. Pertinent Species and Habitat:

Species / Critical Habitat	Status
West Indian Manatee	Endangered
Gulf Sturgeon	Threatened
Gulf Sturgeon Critical Habitat	Designated Final

NMFS  
NMFS

← include  
BMP's  
for Manatee

### VI. Location (attach map):



Figure 1. Artificial reef locations within the Mississippi Sound.

#### A. County and State: Coastal Mississippi

**B. Species/habitat occurrence:** West Indian Manatee and Gulf Sturgeon are known to migrate through these areas. Gulf Sturgeon Critical Habitat has been designated for the Mississippi Sound.

### VII. Determination of effects:

**A. Explanation of effects of the action on species in item V.** It is anticipated that placement of the reef material will be brief (a few days) at any given site so the duration and extent of disturbance will not significantly interfere with migration. If sturgeon or manatee are present, these highly mobile species could avoid any disturbance by moving into adjacent areas of similar, unimpacted habitat. Turbidity in the water column may temporarily increase during the brief deployment. The material may displace or cover some infauna and epifauna. However many epifaunal organisms are mobile and would be minimally affected by the settling material. It is unlikely that artificial reef placement would damage, destroy, or adversely modify any designated critical habitat since the sites proposed to be enhanced are all existing artificial reefs.

#### B. Explanation of actions to be implemented to reduce adverse effects:

None needed.

### VIII. Effect determination and response requested:

Our determination is that this project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect the Gulf Sturgeon and its critical habitat, and the West Indian Manatee. We are requesting concurrence from you on this determination.

[Signature]  
Signature from originating station  
Restoration Specialist  
Title

2/9/12  
Date  
DWH NRDAR  
Office

IX. Reviewing ESO Evaluation:

- A. Concurrence X Nonconcurrence \_\_\_\_\_  
B. Formal consultation required \_\_\_\_\_  
C. Conference required \_\_\_\_\_  
D. Informal conference required \_\_\_\_\_  
E. Remarks (attach additional pages as needed):

Paul Neenan  
Signature of reviewing official  
Fish & Wildlife Biologist  
Title

3-20-12  
Date  
USFWS Mississippi  
Office Field Office